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ABSTRACT

This keynote address begins with examples that underscore how profoundly the issues of multiculturalism and diversity impact the consciousness of society at the end of the 20th century. Changes in assessment that can lead to assessment for change in a culturally diverse society are based on the ideas that "assessment as a process must be considered within a cultural context," and "the basis for understanding the cultural context is the concept of the worldview." Because of differences in aspects of worldviews such as language, people present their personalities, cognitive abilities, interests and other psychoeducational constructs differently. Examples from two different people's lives are given to illustrate the dynamics of language, kinship, religion/spirituality, roles and status, sex role socialization, learning style, and attitudinal orientation, and to illustrate environmental factors such as racism, sexism, economic disadvantage at work in their lives. Failure to take such dynamics into account could impact the assessment process and the interpretation of assessment information. Seven changes in assessment are proposed if assessment is to be used for change. (EMK)

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ASSESSING DIVERSE POPULATIONS

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It is an honor to be a keynote speaker here at *Assessment '98*. I want to take this opportunity to thank ERIC/CASS, AAC, NBCC, and RACC for inviting me. I particularly like the title of this conference – "*Assessment For Change-Changes in Assessment*," because in the words of the old Bob Dylan classic, *"The Times, They are a Changing!"*

I must confess that preparing my remarks for today was both a very easy, and yet, an extremely challenging task. *Easy* in that I can talk about issues of multiculturalism and diversity in my sleep. Yet *challenging*, because I kept asking myself: "What can I say about assessment and diversity that has not already been said in all of those chapters at the end of our testing books; the ones that are usually titled, *"Assessing Special Populations?"*

I would like to start by having you engage in a little audience participation about the concept of changing times. Each evening my wife and I watch the news while eating our dinner. Usually, as we watch incredible news stories from around the

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In the tradition of the African American church we are now going to engage in a little *Call and Response*. I am going to call out some headlines and newsflashes and after each one I am going to point to you and I want you to shrug your shoulders, throw up your hands and say: *"That's life in America at the end of the 20th Century!"*

- *The OJ verdict splits the country into 2 seemingly different countries: one Black, one White*
- *The Million Man March and the Promise Keepers Rally bring empowered men to the Mall in Washington*
- *Ellen "comes-out" on national TV*
- *A school in Louisiana has its name changed because it was named after a famous slave-owner - George Washington*
- *The end of affirmative action in Texas and California*
- *Three out four African American males in Washington D.C. is either in jail, waiting to be sentenced, or on probation*
- *The* ***American for Disabilities Act*** *changes the face of American architecture*
- *A young boy in Chicago is beaten into a coma because he was the wrong color in the wrong neighborhood at the wrong time*
- *A university president finds himself in hot water for his "oreo" remark*
- *President Clinton calls for a "Dialogue on Race," however, it gets bogged down in politics and idle rhetoric.*

Each of these headlines and newsflashes underscore how profoundly the issues of multiculturalism and diversity impact our consciousness at the end of the 20th

century. At the beginning of this century, W.E.B. DuBois wrote that the *"problem of America is the problem of the color line."* I think that at the end of this century we can paraphrase DuBois' quote and say that *the challenge of America is multiculturalism and diversity.* While the color line is still very much present it has been extended to include other areas of cultural difference, such as gender, sexual orientation, physical disability, and social class.

However, as we move into the 21st century, in roughly 700 days, I think that *multiculturalism* and *diversity* are the great promise of America as well. Let me share with you how the field of assessment can play a part in realizing that promise. Here are some thoughts and ideas about changes in assessment that can lead to assessment for change in a culturally diverse society.

Assessment as a process must be considered within a *cultural context.* The basis for understanding cultural context is the concept of *worldview.* A worldview is how over time and over the world, people have come to view the many facets of the human experience. A very important point to consider is that there are major differences in how people come to view the world. Consider, for example, fundamental differences in how people view language. Language is integral to assessment. Language ***is*** culture. Languages are not different words for the same thing, languages are different words for entirely different ways of seeing and conceptualizing the world. The words we use largely determine how we perceive the world.

Because of differences in such aspects of worldviews, such as language, people present their personalities, cognitive abilities, interests and other pyschoeducational constructs differently; *not better or worse just differently!*

Cultural differences in how people come to view the human experience beg the fundamental question. ***"Can we develop assessment tools that accurately and fairly assess psychoeducational constructs across cultures?"*** Consider the cultural context and worldviews of two very different people:

RONALD

Ronald is a 9 year old African American male in the fourth grade in an elementary school in Southeast Washington D.C. He comes to school every day proudly wearing the latest fashions including a cap, baggy/saggy pants and expensive sneakers with the laces untied. Most days when he comes into the classroom, his female teacher confronts him about removing his cap, pulling up his pants, and tying his shoelaces. Ronald usually storms over to the other side of the room, mumbles under his breath, and grudgingly removes his cap.

As the morning's instruction proceeds, Ronald occupies his time interacting with the other boys who sit around him. He enjoys talking with them, giving them "high fives," and generally joking and teasing with them. The teacher perceives Ronald to be inattentive

and the instigator of most of this activity. She proceeds to reprimand him about his behavior.

When the teacher reprimands Ronald, he gets upset at her protestations, claiming that she is picking on him. She claims that he is not paying attention. However, when she presses him about the topic under class discussion, he is able to respond correctly. In fact, Ronald claims that he has raised his hand several times that morning, but that the teacher ignores him.

The teacher notices again that Ronald's shoelaces are still untied. She sternly orders him to tie the laces. Ronald staunchly refuses, stating that this is the way they are supposed to be worn. She states that in her classroom, shoelaces will be tied. Again, she orders him to lace the shoes and moves toward Ronald, placing her hand on his shoulder and looking him squarely in the face.

At this point, Ronald jerks away from the teacher and shouts, "Don't be touchin' me!" He forcefully walks away from the teacher, picks up a book and flings it across the classroom. The teacher then orders Ronald to go to the principal's office.

SARAH

Sarah is a 30 year old White woman from a close knit rural mountain community in central Virginia. She is married with two small children.

Sarah has reluctantly left her husband because he has severely beaten her. When she left home she took refuge at a Women's Center in a nearby town.

Meeting with a counselor at the Women's Center, Sarah expresses strong fundamentalist Christian beliefs. When the counselor asks about facial bruises she states that her husband often beats her to ensure that she remains a "good Christian woman."

When asked to consider the possibility of divorcing her husband Sarah states that she cannot as this would be considered a sin. She claims she would lose her children and be shunned by her family and friends if she took such an action. Sarah expresses concern about her lack of employment experience. She says that the Bible mandates that her place is at home caring for her husband and children.

Let's suppose Ronald is mandated for psychoeducational assessment and Sarah's counselor suggests that she go for career assessment. What are some of concepts related to cultural context that we would want to consider in these cases? What are some of the dynamics that influence the worldview of Ronald and of Sarah that could impact both the assessment process and outcome? The dynamics of *language, kinship, religion/spirituality, roles and status, sex role socialization, learning style, and attitudinal orientation* are readily apparent. Likewise, environmental factors such as *racism, sexism, and economic disadvantage* appear to have impacted the psychosocial development of these two individuals.

Failure to take such dynamics into consideration could impact not only the assessment process but also the interpretation of assessment information as well. Because important decisions are predicated on the outcome of the assessment process, there are several changes that must be considered in assessment if assessment is to be used for change:

1. Ensuring that the development of multicultural/diversity competencies are an integral part of the development of assessment competencies. We need culturally responsive assessment professionals.
2. Clearing up the dichotomy between *culture-specific* and *culture-fair* assessment techniques.
3. Ensuring that normative samples reflect multiculturalism and diversity to the fullest extent possible.
4. Ensuring fair access to assessment - not only for test administrators but test-takers as well.
5. Ensuring that no decision about an individual be made on the basis of a single test score. That all relevant information about an individual, his or her worldview and cultural context are part of the decision-making process.
6. Redefining concepts of validity in light of increasing diversity.
7. Adopting a 21st century agenda with respect to assessment and multiculturalism.

In closing, I think that collectively as a profession, we counselors can lead the way in confronting the challenges and promoting the promise of cultural diversity as the country moves into the 21st century. We can be catalysts for positive social change.

That idea has been my message as ACA President this year. Specifically, those of you who specialize in assessment have the power to promote the important process for collecting decision-making data in important new culturally responsive ways. I would urge you to use your powers for good. For example, work to erase the stigma and suspicion about your specialty that lingers in many diverse communities.

As you continue to construct assessment instruments and adopt testing standards, let the wisdom of an older African American woman from the 1950s guide your thinking. This wisdom comes from Lena Younger, the matriarch in Lorraine Hansberry's classic American play "Raisin in the Sun," which remains the quintessential view of African American family life:

> **"When you starts to measure somebody, measure 'em right child, measure 'em right. Make sure you done taken into account what hills and valleys he done come through before he gets to wherever he is"**

That should be the context of *Assessment for Change*. That's life in America at the end of the 20th Century. Thank you for listening.